

The Honourable Joe Oliver, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Natural Resources

Parliament Hill
Sir William Logan Building, 21st Floor
580 Booth Street
Ottawa, Ontario
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May 7, 2013

Dear Minister Oliver,

As climate scientists, economists and policy experts who have devoted our careers to understanding the climate and energy systems, we share your view that “climate change is a very serious issue.”

But some of your recent comments give us significant cause for concern. In short, we are not convinced that your advocacy in support of new pipelines and expanded fossil fuel production takes climate change into account in a meaningful way.

Avoiding dangerous climate change will require significantly reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and making a transition to cleaner energy.

The infrastructure we build today will shape future choices about energy. If we invest in expanding fossil fuel production, we risk locking ourselves in to a high carbon pathway that increases greenhouse gas emissions for years and decades to come.

The International Energy Agency’s (IEA) “450 scenario” looks at the implications of policy choices designed to give the world a fair chance of avoiding 2°C of global warming. In that scenario, world oil demand is projected to peak this decade and fall to 10 per cent below current levels over the coming decades. The IEA concludes that, absent significant deployment of carbon capture and storage, over two-thirds of the world’s current fossil fuel reserves cannot be commercialized. Other experts have reached similar conclusions.

We are at a critical moment. In the words of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, “each additional ton of greenhouse gases emitted commits us to further change and greater risks.” The longer we delay the transition to low-carbon economy, the more drastic, disruptive and costly that transition will be. The implication is clear: the responsibility for preventing dangerous climate change rests with today’s policymakers.

The IEA also warns of the consequences of our current path. If governments do little to address emissions, energy demand will continue to grow rapidly and will continue to be met mostly with fossil fuels — a scenario that the Agency estimates could likely lead to 3.6°C of global warming.

Yet it is this very dangerous pathway — not the “450 scenario” linked to avoiding 2°C of global warming — that you seem to be advocating when promoting Canadian fossil fuel development at home and abroad.

If we truly wish to have a “serious debate” about climate change and energy in this country, as you have rightly called for, we must start by acknowledging that our choices about fossil fuel infrastructure carry significant consequences for today’s and future generations.

We urge you to make the greenhouse gas impacts of new fossil fuel infrastructure a central consideration in your government’s decision-making and advocacy activities concerning Canada’s natural resources.

We would be very happy to provide you with a full briefing on recent scientific findings on climate change and energy development.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters.

Sincerely,

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